



February 26, 2024

Education, Energy and Environment Committee
ATTN: Chair Brian Feldman
2 West
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Senate Bill 983 – Oppose

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan and Honorable Members of the Education, Energy, and Environment Committee:

On behalf of Safari Club International (SCI), I write to you in opposition to Senate Bill 983 that proposes to phase out all lead ammunition for hunting purposes and respectfully ask for an unfavorable report for the reasons outlined below.

SCI is dedicated to protecting the freedom to hunt and promoting wildlife conservation worldwide. Our organization, along with active members who live, hunt, and recreationally shoot in Maryland, strongly oppose undue lead ammunition restrictions that would significantly restrict physical and economical access for these important user groups in Maryland. SCI believes that efforts related to non-traditional ammunition should not be blanket mandates but rather educational and voluntary.

Mandating non-traditional ammunition for hunting is unnecessary, unwarranted, and will undoubtedly hurt hunter recruitment and retention in the state. States throughout the country are grappling with ways to increase hunter participation, and these restrictions only add additional barriers to entry for hunters, especially new, novice, youth, or rural hunters.

Not only will access to, and availability of, non-lead-based ammo be limited, but the significant price difference between lead ammunition and non-traditional ammunition will provide yet another barrier for those wishing to hunt throughout Maryland. This bill would disproportionately affect those who may not be able to find and/or afford more expensive non-lead ammunition as well as hunters in rural areas throughout the state. The result of prohibiting lead ammunition is that hunters will simply not have the ammunition they need to hunt, or purchasing ammunition will become considerably more difficult, both of which stand to lead to less hunters afield and less conservation dollars generated through the sale of licenses, tags and ammunition.

This stance ignores the fact that hunting is a deep part of Maryland's heritage, and the state's sportsmen and women direct contribution the state's economy. Recent reports show that Maryland hunters contribute \$328 million to the economy while directly supporting over 4100 jobs and providing over \$29 million to state and local taxes. Additionally, the purchase of licenses and resulting federal dollars apportioned through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's



Wildlife Restoration Program totaled nearly \$18 million last year, and these dollars go to support conservation projects, including access, habitat improvement, wildlife management, scientific research, hunter education, land acquisition and more.

A potential decline in hunter recruitment and participation, as well as resultant declines in conservation funding and hunting's role as a management tool, must be weighed against the potential benefits of a lead phase-out. Those benefits are far more limited than proponents of a lead ban like to admit. According to the most recent research, use of lead ammunition is **not** causing a reduction in bird populations. Rather, recent studies have indicated that ingestion of lead ammunition slows the population growth rate of eagles. Past studies have made similar findings—a slowing in the population growth rate—for loons and other waterfowl. Therefore, the end result of a lead ban is likely to be fewer hunters and hunter-generated dollars, and an eagle population that continues to increase just a little bit faster.

Sound, science-based conservation and management decisions is a key tenet of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation. State wildlife agency professionals understand and use this model every day and are the ones best suited to make wildlife management decisions. Being so, I respectfully ask that you oppose Senate Bill 983.

Maintaining America's large number of hunters and target shooters is crucial to maintaining the revenues necessary to sustain abundant wildlife and wildlife habitat—for both game and non-game—conservation programs as well as access related programs. Funds generated through the sale of hunting licenses, tags, permits, and ammunition all go to the benefit of Maryland's natural resources.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this important measure.

Sincerely,

W. Laird Hamberlin, CEO – Safari Club International/Foundation

CC: Secretary Josh Kurtz
Director Paul Peditto